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CAREERS IN THE TRADES

THE

WORKFORCE ISSUE

**BE AN EMPLOYER
OF CHOICE**

**MEMBERS CAN BE PROUD
OF THE GROWTH OF
YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP**
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THE WORKFORCE ISSUE

BE AN EMPLOYER
OF CHOICE

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Members can be proud of the growth of Youth Apprenticeship




ANY ASTUTE MEMBER OF ASSOCIATED BUILDERS AND CONTRACTORS (ABC) OF WISCONSIN PROBABLY REALIZES THAT AS AN ASSOCIATION, WE TEND TO DISAGREE WITH WISCONSIN'S GOVERNOR TONY EVERS. But ABC members can applaud Governor Evers' recent announcement that Wisconsin has achieved a state record of nearly 16,000 registered/adult apprentices in more than 180 sectors from construction to manufacturing to IT and health care.

Governor Evers also announced a record of more than 8,500 youth apprentices; 1,000 in construction. Youth Apprenticeship has only been allowed in Wisconsin since 1991, and only in construction since 2014. Since then, as more parents, educators, and high schoolers realize the benefit of developing skills that can result in a lifelong career that cannot be outsourced. Unlike an internship, which is oftentimes unpaid and gives a high school student a taste of what a job is like, youth apprenticeship is designed for high school students who want hands-on learning in an occupational area, at a worksite, along with classroom instruction. Additionally, youth apprenticeships can serve as a pipeline of young talent as one way to help meet the needs for skilled workers.

While ABC of Wisconsin is proud of its award winning-apprenticeship program, it is only part of the overall solution to fix the workforce shortage. According to the ABC National, it would take 12 years for all the registered construction apprenticeship programs in the U.S. to

train just the 500,000 construction workers needed this year alone. ABC estimates that the construction industry's federal and state government registered apprenticeship system yielded just 45,000 completers of four-to-five-year apprenticeship programs in 2022. That's why programs like Youth Apprenticeship are so important.

You have probably heard the saying "success has 1,000 parents, but failure is an orphan." The typical meaning is that people are often quick to take credit for good things that happen, and distance themselves from things that are unsuccessful. You can look at the saying completely different: the only way to succeed is when everyone works together, and the best way to fail is to go at a problem alone.

While there are many unsuccessful attempts at trying to attract individuals to our industry, youth apprenticeship is not one of them. As ABC members, you can take credit for working together on this program with a such a bright future. 

“
WISCONSIN
HAS ACHIEVED
A STATE RECORD
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16,000
REGISTERED/
ADULT
APPRENTICES.



CRITICAL STRA FOR RETAINING W

By Brad Humphrey – Pinnacle Development Group

Over the past year of working with contractors across the United States, I continue to see the biggest challenge being the retention of workers. Yes, just finding better workers is problematic, but I have witnessed yet another stumbling block that contractors are placing in their way.

Over the past several years, even going on before the COVID pandemic, most contractors were developing some new standards to recruit needed workers. The biggest investment of time, and budget, came in the way of social media expansion. Rather than put up a “We’re Hiring” sign in the front yard, more contractors were signing up to place their job needs online.

This article’s focus is not to discuss the pros and cons of such recruiting, but the post recruiting efforts, which moved recruits to applicants, to eventually new hires, still ran into a process that few contractors are even today, only beginning to assess.

In my book, *The Seven Steps of Employee Retention*, I lay out a strategy that you can follow, tailoring to your company’s culture and needs. I present a snap shot of the first three steps below for our discussion:

Step #1 – “On-Boarding”

- Orientation
- Exposure to “Players”

Step #2 – The 90-Day Plan

- Lines out weekly highlights to learn
- Provides “well-rounded” company picture

Step #3 – Skill Training

- Basics 1st that everyone is held accountable
- Tied specifically to their job function

Steps #1 & #2 are preparation for the new worker. Look to see that both steps are moving the new worker toward a “season of training.” Depending on the skill and knowledge level of a new hire, the training needed will be tailored

to the level of competence of the new worker and experience.

The challenge for many contractors is that they have not ramped up their company to really provide training and education for new hires. Sadly, it’s basically the way we’ve always sort of done things in construction, “Just watch old Bob do that ... and then you do what you see him do.” It’s a poor attempt at “show and tell” and there is more showing than telling in a way that the new worker can truly learn.

When new people are hired, most employees ask three simple questions:

- “What’s my job?”
- “How am I doing?”
- “Who cares?”

Sadly, when new workers leave our workplaces, national statistics vary but provide



STRATEGIES FOR WORKERS

STEP #1 – ON-BOARDING

- ORIENTATION
- EXPOSURE TO PLAYERS

STEP #2 – THE 90-DAY PLAN

- WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS TO LEARN
- WELL-ROUNDED COMPANY PICTURE

STEP #3 – SKILL TRAINING

- EVERYONE IS HELD ACCOUNTABLE
- TIED TO THEIR SPECIFIC JOB FUNCTION

some insight as to their reasons. The three most often voices appear to be:

- 1 No one is talking to me.
- 2 No one is training me.
- 3 No one is following up with me (e.g., coaching)

When you locate that new employee, no matter how you discovered them, how are you getting them involved in the education process? Again, some national trends range but can show some construction workers not remaining with a new contractor for more than 30-45 days ... if they don't get some training.

Say what you want about the different generations and the “cold war” that can exist between them at times, the younger generation has a loyalty of about three to six months. No longer will new workers hang around for two to three years before determining if your company is the right career path for them.

If I were going to give any contractor any advice for how to recruit and retain workers

moving forward it would be to develop a schedule and methodical training program for all new workers. Move them ahead or keep them behind the pace, depending on their skills and competency level, but get the training started on day one!

There's a car bumper sticker I saw a few years ago that I like to share. It read:

“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance!”

Finally, let me leave you with a few intentional steps when looking at training and education.

- 1 Identify what the job will require from the new worker.
- 2 Develop a “paper process” of what you will need to educate the new worker about the job.
- 3 Gather the tools needed to train the new worker.
- 4 Consider the best individual to educate the new worker and try not to select yourself or the new worker's boss.

- 5 Spread the training over the worker's first 6, 8, even 12 weeks of work.
- 6 If the worker completes the training process, give them a gift card to a store or to the local hamburger restaurant.
- 7 Follow-up, often, with the new worker to see how they are adjusting.

The new workers entering our industry are often very bright, however, many have not had a great chance to screen our industry. In other words, they've not often had a parent, or another relative who was in the industry.

Start today toward building a training process for your new workers. It will be the best money spent and will provide more return-on-investment than you might think.

Happy training! 

Brad Humphrey, President of Pinnacle Development Group, has been assisting contractors for more than thirty-five years in more than fifteen countries. Find out more about Brad and his company by going to www.pinnacledg.com.

ABC of Wisconsin commercial construction team earns gold at National Craft Championships



Left to right, Eric Munz of PDC Electrical Contractors/A-1 Electric, Matt McGrath of Sure-Fire Inc., Charlie Earle of Milestone Plumbing Inc., and Tyler Odegard of Royal Construction, Inc., took the gold award in the competition's team-commercial contest. The team members didn't know each other until the week of the competition. The four craft journey-level professionals worked as a team to complete a series of craft-specific tasks focused on electrical, plumbing, sheet metal/HVAC and carpentry in a six-hour period.



Hayden Oestreich, an electrical apprentice for Lyons Electric, took the silver award in the competition's residential and commercial electrical contest. Oestreich had advanced to the NCC after receiving the top score in electrical during ABC of Wisconsin's Skill Competition on Jan. 27 in West Bend.



Ali Gordee, a carpentry apprentice for Northcentral Construction Corp., received the safety award in the competition's carpentry contest. Gordee is only the second female from ABC of Wisconsin to compete at the NCC. Gordee had advanced to the NCC after receiving the top score in carpentry during ABC of Wisconsin's Skills Competition on Jan. 27 in West Bend.

CULTURE, TRANSPARENCY, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IDENTIFIED AS KEY COMPANY ATTRIBUTES BY CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

WORKFORCE BE AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

By Kyle Schwarm – ABC of Wisconsin Marketing & Communications Director

As employers in the construction industry struggling to find the best workers to make you competitive, you have expectations about the graduates of construction management (CM) programs. The industry perspective is important in defining the necessary skills of qualified CM graduates. You want individuals who understand the fundamentals of construction, including estimating, scheduling, and cost control. But how will you attract the best and brightest in today's competitive market without knowing their desires about their future employers?

ABC National hosted a panel discussion at its convention in March to address this. The session, What Does It Take To Be an Employer of Choice, addressed what contractors can do to stand out from the competition when trying to attract these individuals to join their teams.

The panel was led by Gretchen Bockenbauer, Program Coordinator and Assistant Professor in Construction Management at UW-Platteville. Participants included Camden Johnson, Construction Management Student at the University of Northern Iowa; Kennedy Kramek, Construction Management Student at Michigan State University, and Zach Wynstra, Construction Management Student at University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

Here are some of the more valuable unedited excerpts from that discussion to provide perspectives from these students:

What are the three things you look for in a company when making your decision for an internship and then full-time job?

Zach Wynstra: First three things, assuming that the company already has good culture and you fit in with and all that, how much the company wants to invest back into you, if that's certifications, setting up the right software, and safety training ... everything else. That's a big one because I'd rather work with a company that wants to continually make me better. And



From left to right are Camden Johnson, University of Northern Iowa, Kennedy Kramek, Michigan State, and Zach Wynstra, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, all construction management students and panelists who discussed what they seek in their future employers.

that's how you grow as company leaders ... and then also, having room for advancement, being able to do it in house when you have opportunities of hiring from outside. If you're there and you're dedicated and you're working for the company and giving your time ... I would like to have that room for advancement with it and have a regular open conversation, regular checkups, making sure that you're happy where you're at.

Kennedy Kramek: The main things I look for is just right up front, the company, is if they can tell me what my opportunities are going to be, how I have to fulfill these goals and how I'm going to be able to succeed in a team environ-

ment, a culture that strives for success and excellence. Just working together and all the time. So good culture basically. And of course, just showing that they're also willing to invest in me as an individual whether that be programs to benefit if I ever want to have family balance my life or even further education and just grow as a professional speaker going to work for 30 years, but also continue to grow in my interest in academics or professionally.

Camden Johnson: For me, it's very much similar. Culture is definitely number one. The people that you're with and location. For culture, I always like to talk to contactors about the culture and then see if they're goanna talk about



I ALWAYS LIKE TO TALK TO CONTACTORS ABOUT THE CULTURE AND THEN SEE IF THEY'RE GOANNA TALK ABOUT IT.

CAMDEN JOHNSON

it or be about it because a lot of people talk about their culture when they don't do anything to promote their culture and at the end of the day, there's going to be problems. It's just inevitable, and how you face those problems and the people that you deal with will make or break your career and if you enjoy it or not. So, culture is definitely number one and then actually making the promise to keep that culture and then keeping up on that promise, because I see a lot that people talk about their culture. You go there and then you find out it's not exactly what they hyped up when they were interviewing you ... Right now, I work for a company called Build It. They're mainly a heavy civil side of the industry and I sell their training platform while I'm in school and I talk to companies all the time that are pushing training, and I talk to companies that aren't interested in training and then I see the companies that are pushing training and employees that they're getting in. Right now, everyone's having employee retention problems and finding good employees ... and the people that push training and are willing to provide it I see they have a lot more success retaining employees and finding them and it makes me want to go work there more because they're investing in their people.

Do you want to be stationary or are you good about moving?

Zach Wynstra: The work life balance as we all know isn't necessarily a thing that you can really get in construction. I think we all know that. You can try for it and everything else but it's when you have to be on site you have to be on site; you gotta go over the work is. That's what I've always been used to. I want to travel for another six, seven years because I think you learn a lot more and a lot. You just learned a lot more within those six years than being station-

ary because that's all you have to do. Really, it's not like you can go home and love your hobbies or anything else. There's the money aspect of it; how they make more money traveling. I think you can advance a lot farther doing that. But by the time I hit 28/29 I'd like to be stationary and start a family one day. I'm not gonna work for the money anymore, because I have money and I hated it and I would much rather have the quality of life within the company than going for the money because you only have so much time. I learned that the hard way and that's the reason why I went to school. But traveling wise, I like it because I've seen a lot of different states a lot of different places and it's nice. But the financial aspect is huge. I wouldn't be doing it for just the same salary as being in office because you miss out on family holidays, friends, everything else. I'd say it's pretty even next for me. The finances definitely have to be there. To be able to do it. I think everyone already kind of knows that.

Camden Johnson: I'm in a very similar boat as Zach. I built bridges for the summer at Davis Bacon pay; made a lot of money. I can do it just about anywhere and make a lot of money doing it but it's not about the money. I found that out the first summer doing it that I'd rather be happy in life than be making a lot of money because there's just more to it and then getting offers here recently, money has been a little bit of it, but more so has been the culture and the people that I will be working with just because if I hate work every day, money can't fix that.

Kennedy Kramek: I have a similar approach because even, with the perspective of someone young who's in college and has like student debt, you can feel pressure like, "Oh, I really need to try to better my future by pursuing this money to get out of this situation." But I started realizing maybe more of a short sighted outlook to it -- and even this past year -- looking at internships, I ended up accepting one that was like, way, way less money than one of them because I was like this doesn't seem like the place I'm going and what I'm going to be doing that's not what I want for the growth of my career or like what I think I need for like a stepping stone moving forward.

What social media platforms do you research or use to look up companies to figure out their training, culture, and environment?



Zach Wynstra, student at the UW-Platteville, shares his take on what contractors can do to enhance their appeal to prospective employees.

Zach Wynstra: I immediately go to LinkedIn. That was heavy on me. I go to that for everything. I think that's a lot of where it's going. I know a lot of other people my generation probably won't say that, but that's immediately where I go.

Kennedy Kramek: I'll occasionally use Google; LinkedIn for actually creating like real connections to be able to see the actual people, not just like a website. It's a different experience.

Camden Johnson: I do the same thing with LinkedIn. I'll go to LinkedIn and I'll look at the people that are at that company, because it'll list them and then I'll connect with them ... and then I'll search through their profiles and see what they've talked about and find what experiences they have had. I definitely do a lot of background research into companies when I'm considering them for employment.

What do you like to see when you look on LinkedIn?

Zach Wynstra: I want to see what their culture is, what they're performing, what they're doing, what they're doing for their employees as well as their company atmosphere. I want to be able to scroll through and see the pictures and be able to read the bios with it all as if it was kind of like taking a tour of what the company is now and that atmosphere because that's what you would want to know if you were to be talking to the company.

Kennedy Kramek: Yeah, like it's kind of be a snapshot into what my work experience would be like if I was employed by a company and obviously, events you're doing; projects you're on; different things going on; different things that you're attending.

Much has been made about work/life balance and a hybrid work environment. In your opinion. What do you think is the preferred environment for someone who is early in their construction career?

Kennedy Kramek: At first glance, I believe it would be awesome to be hybrid work all the time, but when I think about it, that's really a lot like how my college experience has been; a lot of independent work. We're just doing stuff on your laptop alone. And that's not what I want my step from college to employment place to be. I need to be around the professionals and other peoples' experiences; for them to be able to mentor me for me to be able to absorb all that knowledge, you really get to bond and develop like team relationships.

Zach Wynstra: Being that it's early in our careers ... I don't think there really is work life balance if you want to excel within the industry, because you get what you put into it. I want to

be able to work and have all the opportunity and all the room for advancement and be able to collect all the knowledge that I can, no matter how much time that takes. But I want my holidays off; my dad's birthday parties on the weekend; want to be able to go home for a funeral; no question, to be able to go home for those important things that you never get to do again. I want to prioritize those and be able to make it back for it, but I don't need to go home on the weekend just to go home.

Camden Johnson: I agree a lot with Zach especially on the hybrid part of things. I didn't get into construction to see the same four walls every single day. I want to get out and see new things and do things. So, I'm good with hybrid if we have to for a meeting across the country. If I need to be a person, I'd prefer it. There's just something different about talking to people face to face; you get to shake their hand. You can't fake that over the camera. You can be a really fake person over camera very easily, but it's hard to fake who you are in person. And someone can read right through you when you're telling the truth and when you know what you're talking about.



IT'S DEFINITELY ABOUT BEING ABLE TO SEE THAT THERE'S A FAIR AND PERSONALIZED SYSTEM IN PLACE FOR ME TO ADVANCE AND CONTINUE TO IMPROVE MY CAREER.

KENNEDY KRAMEK

What is it going to be to keep you at that company? What do you think is going to be important? Two or three things down the road, such as opportunities, travels, benefits, what, what is most important?

Zach Wynstra: The most important thing would be having the ability to have room for

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THE LARGER YOU ARE, THE MORE CORPORATE AND THE FARTHER UP YOU GO, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO FOCUS ON YOUR EMPLOYEES AS MUCH. THERE ARE DIFFERENT OBLIGATIONS.

ZACH WYNSTRA

advancement and to take on more opportunities if you want it. I really want to stay involved with ABC, so having an opportunity to be open to the employer and say I want to be able to get involved. Not everyone can do it. I want to be able to have an opportunity to make connections and be more intertwined within the construction industry; just have that opportunity.

Camden Johnson: I agree completely, I'd say growth within to that point too ... and just seeing other people around me grow within the company, too is a huge thing for me, because it gives me the foresight that I will too because I know that the first three months I'm not going to automatically get to this next level or it can be any amount of time and that's also the big thing is not having a canned time where after three months you move up after two years. Everyone grows at different paces. I'd like a personal experience at those meetings when we're talking about how I've done over the past six months, tell me what I need to improve to get to the next step, because it should be different for every person. The work can be really rough but if the people around you are great to work with, it makes everything so much better. This last summer I did some work that I didn't enjoy all that much but the people I worked with were great. So, it made the work very bearable, and I still enjoy going to work every day. Even though the work was not always the best it can be.

Kennedy Kramek: I agree for longevity, it's definitely about being able to see that there's a

fair and personalized system in place for me to advance and continue to improve my career and the people really is the big thing. So, even this past year, some jobs I'd have to get up at like 4 a.m. to drive an hour and a half and it wasn't my love for the scope of work we were doing that was motivating me to get up. It was being accountable and being a part of a team and with the people and wanting to be with them that really drove me. Obviously, over an entire career, I imagine it will be the same no matter how challenging or not the work is you're doing.

Gretchen Bockenauer: In your areas, in your regions, if you're struggling or you just have questions, you should reach out to your universities because we can guide you. We know all our students very well. At our university, we have over 300 students and I know every one of them. And so when a company asks me, "What do you think about this student?" And I may say, "They don't stand out in my mind." Right away, that should be your red flag, right?

ABC has a lot of specialty contractors. When you guys are looking at employers, do you prefer to work for a GC or are you open to working for a specialty contractor?

Camden Johnson: I worked for a specialty contractor this summer and I had a lot of offers from specialty contractors and I actually really enjoy specialty contractors and would almost prefer to work for a specialty contractor. The value you add to a project is very important from the specialty contractor. You can control the schedule a lot and in a good way, along with the relationships you can build with general contractors. I find the relationship with general contractors very interesting. Also, I like that fact that I can see a lot of projects too, as a specialty contractor. I was not on one project for 18 months. When I was working for a specialty contractor, I could think of seven, multi-million-dollar projects that I was on at the same time and that was really cool. I got to do a lot of different stuff and was able to see a lot of different things.

Kennedy Kramek: I think specialty contractors have a lot of strengths that perhaps GCs, with the big fancy buildings, may get overlooked. I worked for a concrete specialty contractor and there was so much to learn about concrete. That opportunity allowed me to learn something more in depth.

Zach Wynstra: I really like specialty contracting. With the electrical company I worked for, we were industrial and agricultural related, so we were very specialized compared with other electrical contractors. They aren't exposed to students as much as GCs are, but I think they

would pick up a hell of a lot more students if they were coming to career fairs and everything else. I know specialty contractors aren't big enough to be doing that, but you can still get more involved; talking to the program coordinators [at universities] would make a really big difference because the majority of the students that I know, all they look at are all the big GCs because they're the ones doing the recruiting. You just got to get your name out there and tell your story. That would make a big difference.

When you talk about culture, size makes a difference. When you talk about culture, do you prefer the larger contractor or something smaller?

Zach Wynstra: I've worked for companies with 60 employees and 7,000, another one had 1,000 and another had 100. The larger you are, the more corporate and the farther up you go, you're not going to be able to focus on your employees as much. There are different obligations. So, with the culture of 100 employers or 150 persons or less is what I focus on because you can still go up to your boss. The company I'm with right now, it's open. The V.P., the president, anyone you want to talk with them, give them a phone call. That's what I love about it. With those large contractors, it comes down to communication; just communication.

Camden Johnson: I agree a lot with Zach. I worked for one this summer that was 1,200 people, which is quite a few, but the CEO still had an open-door policy. You could come and talk to him about anything, and that was huge for me because I knew the opportunity was there and I appreciated that he actually cared about me. As you get upwards of 5,000 employees, I understand that it's just not a thing. You can't get to know 5,000 employees. You just don't have the time in the day for it. I can see the smaller contractor being better. I almost prefer it because, you know, everyone in the company, I walk in the door, I know everyone's first name and all their kids and that's very attractive to me.

Kennedy Kramek: In my experience at a smaller residential contractor, it was a really cohesive culture, but at the larger one, it seemed like there were a variety of different cultures at the different offices [around the country]. Even when I went to corporate they were like, "Oh, in Detroit they're rock stars and it's a really great place to be." Everyone had to adopt to the corporate culture, but you really need to speak to the specific offices and the specific teams to see if this [culture] is held way up top on their values. 



Jim Bunkelman from ABC member Royal Construction is running an activity with students at the Career Fair in Eau Claire.

CAREER FAIRS

AND RAISING AWARENESS OF CAREERS IN THE TRADES

By Elizabeth Roddy – ABC of Wisconsin Recruitment & Training Director

When Governor Walker was in office, one of the things he did was to require that, starting in 8th grade, all students must participate in academic and career planning activities. Each school is required to host a certain amount of career exploration experience. Because of this, many high schools host career fairs or career presentations. Although it might not be your

favorite thing to do and sometimes hard to justify the time away from work, participation is necessary if we are going to get some of these high school students to consider our great industry.

ABC of Wisconsin participates in quite a few of them and has learned some tips when participating in events.

Setting up your space for a career fair

Every school is a little different as far as what kind of tables they give you and how much space you have. This is why if you see ABC coming to one of these events, we roll in our double-decker Milwaukee Packout full of a variety of different things that we can mix and match, depending on the type of event and the space provided.

THE BIGGEST THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT WE ARE REPRESENTING AN ESSENTIAL INDUSTRY THAT HAS A WORKER SHORTAGE.

If you are just doing these events sporadically, reach out to the school and see what you'll be given. Here are some ideas of what you can bring:

- **Tablecloth and/or a banner with your company logo on it.** If you are just doing these events occasionally, you might not want to invest a bunch of money in something professional. You want to make sure your table looks somewhat put together and that people walking by can either see your logo or understand what you are promoting.
- **Pictures or some kind of video screen.** (I've seen anything from just some on-the-job pictures printed off, to a tablet, to a full monitor) that shows the kind of work you do. Remember, many of these kids have no idea what is actually done in your trade. For example, they think that all plumbers do all day is unclog toilets. Show the students the variety of work that you do.
- **Business cards or some kind of flyer about your company and how to contact you.** Even though we are in a digital world, kids still like to have something on a piece

of paper that they can take with them to reference.

- **Sign-up-Sheet.** If you participate in the Youth Apprenticeship or if you are looking for someone to hire right out of high school, have a sign-up sheet or find a way for people to write their contact information down so you can connect with them.
- **Something hands on.** This isn't absolutely necessary, but if you have something fun for the kids to try, it does tend to attract kids to your area. Ideas include:
 - **Something related to your trade** (a screwgun and a piece of lumber for them to drill in a screw, or a wire and an outlet for them to work on are good examples)
 - **Some kind of game** (examples: a Plinko board where they can win something, a trivia game... recently, I saw a member had a game called "shoot the poop" where you fling poop into a toilet, which then actu-

ally helped him start the conversation that plumbing is more than unclogging toilets)

- **Candy or some kind of give away.** A big bowl of candy or silly giveaways go a long way to starting conversations with the kids.
- **Interacting with the students/participants.**

Career fairs are a great way to expose students to many different careers at once, but it is sometimes a bit overwhelming to these young people who find it intimidating to talk to a bunch of random businesses. If you are invited to the classroom to present, it can also be hard to get the kids to open up and speak.

When you are at a career fair, many times it helps to stand in front of the table instead of sitting behind it. It can help start conversations and you have a better chance to "draw in" the student if you are standing right there, smiling, and starting up a conversation with them.

Some good questions to start with:

- What are you thinking for a career someday?
- Have you ever thought of a career in the construction industry?
- Do you know what a (insert your trade) does?



ABC of Wisconsin Recruitment & Training Director Elizabeth Roddy shares a presentation on construction careers to tech-ed students at Lakeside Lutheran High School in Lake Mills.

Mario Rodriguez (standing) and Mike Frost from ABC member Mr Plumber are having fun with students at a career event at Fort Atkinson High School.



For class presentations, bring candy if you want the students to talk to you and answer your questions. It sounds simple, but a few mini candy bars and sporadic questions in your presentation helps so that the students raise their hands and stay awake.

Expectations for the event.

When it comes to most of these career outreach events, “success” is often hard to quantify, because typically these are more for awareness rather than actual job placement. The biggest thing to remember is that we are representing an essential industry that has a worker shortage. If we don’t get out there and at least try to spread the word about our careers, some of these kids will never consider our industry.

Now, more than ever, students and parents do seem to be more open to the idea of apprenticeships and hands-on industries, but many have no idea how to start one or that they even exist. These events and conversations are essential to our industry’s future workforce.

Remember, most teenagers aren’t going to be overly excited about participating in these career events they are often required to attend (at least not outwardly in front of their friends). But internally, many of them are lost and have

no idea what they are doing after graduation. You might be able to spark an idea, or at least the beginning of an idea, that they might not normally have even considered.

Recruitment Dos and Don’ts

Don’t be negative about construction.

Half of recruitment is marketing, and with the worker shortage in most industries these days, we are in a public relations race with many other types of jobs. In construction, we have a tendency to talk about how hard the work is right off the bat or how we are “just carpenters (or insert your trade).”

We can’t continue to lead with all the negatives of our industry, or we will scare off more people than we can ever recruit. Instead, try providing the answers to these questions: Why do you like your job? Why have you continued to work in this industry? What is the neatest thing you have ever worked on? Start there. The military doesn’t start off their commercials talking about getting shot at, and similarly, we shouldn’t start our initial marketing messaging talking about your two knee replacements or working in the cold.


Do talk about long range opportunities.

These are not dead-end jobs. This is an industry full of opportunity and potential careers

that can take individuals around the country and in a variety of positions. This next generation is looking for ways to help others and do things to change the world; that is something this industry does every day. Our industry offers travel, career growth, variety of work, and entrepreneurship.

Do discuss financial benefits.

Choosing the right career isn’t necessarily about money, but money does help. The student loan crisis is real, but with the registered apprenticeship program and/or on the job training, there isn’t the financial burden of debt. Wages and benefits in our industry are very competitive, and they are continuing to rise as our skilled worker shortage increases. Not to mention, the financial benefits not directly on the paycheck; like fixing their own house, having a company vehicle, and being able to leave work at work.

Participating in career events can be very rewarding if you are prepared and have a good attitude. We have a lot to be proud of in our industry, and we should be excited to talk about the great work we do. Remember to keep it positive and have fun with it. This is an important part of your job, not only for your company, but for our entire industry. 

– INDUSTRIAL EXOSKELETONS ARE WEARABLE DEVICES DESIGN



EXOSKELETON

& THEIR POTENTIAL FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

By Zhenhua Zhu and Mariya Sorensen

The construction industry is labor-intensive even with the continuous development and advent of new tools and machines in the market. Millions of people are hired and as-

sociated with different trades (e.g., laborer, carpenter, plumber, and electrician). They are heavily involved in the vast majority of skilled manual handling work. Almost 90% of their

jobs require manual handling of materials for approximately one-half of their time. [1] The long-time, repetitive, and physically demanding manual handling work exposes them to

...ED TO MECHANICALLY ASSIST WORKERS IN THE WORKPLACE —



IONS

a great risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs), a group of painful disorders of muscles, tendons, and nerves caused or aggravated by work. In 2017, the rate of WMSDs was 31.2~ cases per 10,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) workers in construction, 9% higher than the rate for all industries combined. [2] The estimated cost of construction industry worker's compensation costs brought on by WMSDs in the United States is more than \$2 billion annually. [3] In those WMSD incidents, the back and shoulder are the most impacted body parts. Back injuries accounted for 43%

of nonfatal occupational injuries in construction in 2018 with a median of eight lost workdays; and shoulder injuries accounted for 16%, with a median of 25 lost workdays. [4]

Industrial exoskeletons are wearable devices designed to mechanically assist workers in the workplace. They focus on augmenting or reinforcing the performance of workers' body parts, primarily the lower back and the upper extremity (arms and shoulders) areas, to protect workers from potential WMSDs during strenuous and physically demanding tasks. Depending on whether external power

is used, exoskeletons can be classified into active and passive ones. Active exoskeletons have powered components and consist of one or more actuators that could actively augment power to the human body. For example, an active exoskeleton with multiple motors and electric systems could turn a person into a super worker who was capable of safely lifting and manipulating up to 200 pounds. [5] Passive exoskeletons do not have actuators. Instead, they mainly rely on springs and/or dampers to store and release energy and counterbalance forces by redistributing weight from one body

part to others. This way, the weight is spread out and the chance of strain and injury is reduced. In addition, exoskeletons can be classified into upper extremity, lower extremity, and full-body ones, depending on which human body parts they target. Upper extremity exoskeletons provide support to the arms, shoulders, and upper torso; lower extremity exoskeletons provide support to the legs, hips, and lower torso; and full-body exoskeletons provide support to the whole human body.

At present, the industry has not recognized the price, stability, and versatility of active full-body exoskeletons, while arm- and back-support passive exoskeletons, such as Hilti-EXO 01, Ekso EVO, HeroWear Apex, and Ottobock SuitX, have entered the marketing stage and received wide attention. Their effectiveness has been tested in a number of controlled laboratory studies. The results have illustrated that the use of these exoskeletons could help test participants reduce their muscle activity levels, perceived exertion, and metabolic costs, although the magnitude of these beneficial effects depend on specific task conditions and individual differences. For example, more neutral work postures and reduced spinal muscle loading were noted when lifting with low-back exoskeletons.^[6] Deltoid muscle strain was also decreased for overhead tasks while using

shoulder-assist exoskeletons.^[7]


Despite the promising effects noted from the laboratory-based studies, it is still essential and critical to collect field-based evidence to support the safe and efficient use of exoskeletons by construction workers before any decision is made to deploy exoskeletons in practice. So far, the quantitative assessment of exoskeletons' efficacy as an intervention to control the risks of WMSDs in construction fields is limited. Most assessment works were built upon qualitative or subjective measures through interviews and surveys. To address this limitation, the Digital and Robotics Construction Research Group at the University of Wisconsin – Madison has been working with

the Milwaukee-based team in the M.A. Mortenson Company. Several pilot tests (photos on the previous page) were conducted to compare the joint motions, heart rates, task completion time, and opinions of professional construction workers when they perform routine tasks with and without exoskeletons. The quantitative comparison results help researchers and construction practitioners advance an understanding of the actual effectiveness, practicality, safety, and user acceptance of exoskeletons in construction fields. Also, they provide insightful thoughts on optimizing the match among exoskeletons, workers, and tasks to maximize exoskeletons' beneficial effects and minimize their potential undesirable outcomes or risks. This ongoing work is financially supported by the National Science Foundation.

If the accumulated field-based evidence supports the efficacy of exoskeletons, it will facilitate and promote the use and integration of exoskeletons in construction operations. Then, the following benefits or broad impacts are expected.

① Improving the safety of construction workers and creating a better safety culture. Workers are critical assets contributing to the success of construction projects. The use of exoskeletons will improve their safety by reducing the chance of fatigue and muscle strain and the risk of wear and tear injuries at work. This, in return, will benefit the construction industry and society with huge cost savings.

② Alleviating the shortage of skilled construction workforce. The use of exoskeletons will provide additional assistance for post-surgery construction workers and help them with recovery and discomfort. It facilitates retaining the current workforce by extending their career life spans. Also, it can expand the skilled workforce by attracting candidates (e.g., women) into construction trades who may otherwise not consider such jobs due to their physically demanding nature.

③ Enhancing construction labor productivity. The work performance gains achieved by exoskeleton-enabled work may help increase construction productivity and reduce project cost overruns and schedule delays. The construction industry accounts for a significant portion of the economy and it is still booming. However, its productivity has only grown by 1% over the past two decades, compared with the 2.8% growth of global productivity.^[8] 44% of construction firms reported that projects have taken longer than originally anticipated, and 43% reported that costs have been higher.^[9] With the passing of the \$1 trillion Infrastructure Bill in 2021, it has become imperative that we address the need for growing the construction workforce and improving construction productivity. 



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EVENT REMINDERS



- **APPRENTICESHIP GRADUATION BANQUET**
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- **FA/CPR TRAINING**
Appleton, May 19
- **FA/CPR TRAINING**
Wausau, May 22
- **FA/CPR TRAINING**
Eau Claire, May 23
- **SPORTING CLAY SHOOT**
Warrens, May 25
- **BLUEBEAM FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS**
Online, May 25
- **GOLF SCRAMBLE AT THE OAKS**
Cottage Grove, June 7
- **SECRETS OF A WORKING MOM IN CONSTRUCTION**
Online, June 8
- **READING CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS**
Online, June 12
- **10-HOUR OSHA CONSTRUCTION SAFETY & HEALTH OUTREACH**
Appleton, June 15 & 16
- **TRANSITION TO TRAINER**
Madison, June 16
- **FROM APPRENTICE TO OWNER: LESSONS LEARNED ALONG THE WAY**
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- **FA/CPR TRAINING**
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THE DAILY REPORTER

REDUCE CONSTRUCTION WORKER SUICIDES

THIS REQUIRES A COLLECTIVE EFFORT BY ALL CONTRACTORS

By Matt Morley – Kraemer Brothers

According to Mental Health America, one in five American adults is currently struggling with diagnosable mental illness. Examples of these illnesses include anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse disorders. Over half of these adults do not seek treatment. When left untreated, like any other medical condition, mental health challenges can worsen and lead to crisis. Current estimates show the percentage of American adults reporting serious thoughts of suicide is 4.6% and rising.

The construction industry is not immune to this nationwide trend; in fact, it is quite the opposite. The suicide rate for construction workers is the second highest of all industries, with agriculture having the highest rate overall. To put our crisis in clearer terms, the construction industry as a whole currently averages three fatal accidents per workday. In that same 24-hour time period, 15 construction workers will die by suicide. In other words, American construction workers are five times more likely to die by suicide than to experience a fatal accident at work.

Why is the construction industry so uniquely impacted by this crisis? There are a variety of theories but in all likelihood, the root cause is a summation of several moving parts. As a safety professional, I still encounter tradespeople who are reluctant to report physical injuries due to what I would call their “suck it up” mentality. They feel they will either be branded as weak or they can treat the injury themselves. Now apply that same mindset to an invisible illness. How do you think that same tradesperson will address that pain?

Working construction can be isolating. Our projects and workforce are fluid, which leads to some employees failing to establish meaningful relationships at work. Maybe your organization has people on the road away from their families for days, or even weeks, at a time. A feeling of social isolation can lead to depression, which when left untreated, can lead to the individual becoming even more socially withdrawn. This downward spiral is cyclical and happens more quickly than we can process it.

Working hours can vary greatly depend-

ing on the overall workload and schedules of specific projects. Construction offers a combination of low job control (being physically relocated where the work is), job insecurity (potential lay-off), and long hours when project schedules fall behind or are especially tight. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) refers to these occupational factors as “job strain” and indicates, “The odds for moderate to severe suicidal ideation [suicidal thoughts] were about four times greater in those with job strain or those who reported long work hours.” I challenge you to find another industry with greater potential for excessive job strain.

A byproduct of inconsistent working hours is potential financial hardships. The unknown of next week’s hours can lead to paycheck anxiety. Without proper budgeting, large fluctuations in work leave employees in dire circumstances during slow periods. Falling behind on car payments, mortgages, or even simply struggling to put food on the table can leave people feeling helpless with very few options to get out. According to the Aspen

3 fatal accidents

in construction per day in U.S.



15 suicides

among construction workers per day



Institute, 16% of suicides in the U.S. occur in response to a financial problem.

Substance abuse issues can also lead to, or be a symptom of, mental health challenges. According to American Addiction Centers, “Employees of the construction industry, mostly blue-collar workers, have nearly twice the rate of substance abuse as the national

average. Around 15% of all construction workers in the U.S. have a substance abuse disorder compared to 8.6% of the general population of adults.” Many of us are not surprised that Wisconsin ranks in the top ten for alcohol consumption per capita; it seems to be ingrained in our culture. According to the National Library of Public Medicine, those suf-

fering from alcohol use disorder are ten times more likely to attempt suicide than the national average.

What you can do

I encourage you to think of all the proactive steps you take within your organization to prevent workplace injuries. Everything from the safety professionals you may employ or consult,



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988

to training programs, to the personal protective equipment you provide. Contractors across the country spend millions of dollars and countless hours in an effort to minimize injuries on their projects and keep their employees going home to their families each evening. As a result, our industry has seen a drastic decline in the recordable incident rates (RIR) and lost time incident rates (LTIR) over the last 30 years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.


Now consider what steps you are taking to prevent self-harm or suicide within your workforce. As mentioned, the average construction worker is five times more likely to die by suicide than to become a victim of a fatal workplace accident. By simply looking at that statistic, should we as an industry be doing something to bring awareness and provide resources to those at risk? The answer to that question is we are, but it needs to be a collective effort made by all contractors.

This year at SuperCon '23, the ABC of Wisconsin Safety Committee devoted an entire track, or 20%, of the sessions, to mental health and wellness. OSHA has made suicide in construction a point of emphasis and has Construction Suicide Prevention Week September 4-8. Internally, I was able to attend a Mental Health First Aid class presented by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) last year, which placed an emphasis on the agricultural and construction industries. No matter the resource, the underlying message to combat this crisis is very similar.

The first step in normalizing and bringing awareness to the unique mental health challenges that plague the construction industry is simply talking about it. Our society as a whole has stigmatized mental illness to the point where those who suffer from them are reluctant to seek treatment out of fear of being judged or labeled as inferior or unstable. The

truth is, one in five Americans are living with a diagnosable medical illness that can and should be treated like any physical illness. ABC of Wisconsin, along with OSHA, has a variety of toolbox talks and publications that can help start this conversation among your workforces.

The next step is providing resources for employees to seek help, while also encouraging them to do so when needed. Employee Assistance Programs (EAP's) are awesome resources for employees and can provide counseling on mental health, financial, legal, or other life challenges. If your organization does not currently offer an EAP, ask your health insurance provider or broker what is available. At Kraemer Brothers, we found an EAP was available to us at no additional cost. Sound mental health often translates into better physical health, so chances are your health insurance carrier will celebrate your enrollment in an EAP.

Lastly, if you encounter a situation where you believe a suicide attempt by your employee or coworker is imminent, know what to do. Do not hesitate to call 911; especially if the individual has divulged, they have a plan and the means to take their own life. Several crisis lines also exist and can be utilized by an individual in crisis or a concerned coworker or friend. Use them and spread the word. We're all in this together. 

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